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AUTHOR Marks, Joseph Lappin
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ABSTRACT

Two schools of thought exist with regard to the goals of humanities instruction. The "university orientation" places an emphasis upon impersonal, intellectual, and purely academic objectives. The "liberal arts orientation" maintains that humanities instruction should contribute to the beliefs, values, expectations, attitudes, fears, emotions, and self-images of students. This latter orientation, which is currently strongly represented in the literature, tends to be pushing the humanities from its traditional place with specialized college programs into the realm of general education. One way to resolve these conflicting demands on community colleges is to develop a two-pronged curriculum with courses which serve the two interest groups of transfer students wishing to transfer college credits directly to a four-year institution, and other students whose interests may lie in cultural enrichment. Extremes of relevance-seeking approaches that are academically unsophisticated, and courses with overwhelmingly rigorous standards are to be avoided. The humanities department chairperson should take a leadership role in promoting the right course of action in individual institutions. (A bibliography is included.) (HB)

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GOAL CONFLICT IN HUMANITIES EDUCATION

by

Joseph Lappin Marks

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Goal Conflict in Humanities Education

Introduction

The role department/division chairpersons have in community and four-year colleges is one that, in sociological terms, is characterized by role conflict.[1] It is the purpose of this essay to document a case for the claim that humanities chairpersons find themselves in a role further characterized by goal conflict. Two schools of thought regarding humanities education are presented. It is argued that community and four-year college humanities areas have a commitment to and are influenced by both schools of thought. Conflicting directions are thus pressed on humanities areas and their mid-level leaders. The nature of these conflicts is discussed. Two proposals for dealing with the conflicts are presented emphasizing the role of the mid-level leader.

Two Views of Humanities Education

Regarding the teaching of philosophy Goosens argues that philosophy should not be thought to promote "ways of life."[2] This aim, or the similar "cultural enrichment" aim, are the familiar liberal arts or general education aims often thought to be the particular responsibility of philosophy and other humanities disciplines. But Goosens implies that these general education aims must encompass a larger

segment of the educational process than the primary instructional level. That is, the institution should have such goals, towards the achievement of which philosophy and the other humanities disciplines make a contribution. The achievement of this broad aim involves contributing to and shaping the beliefs, values, expectations, attitudes, fears, emotions and self-images of students.[3] Individual disciplines cannot be saddled with such a broad aim. They should be charged with more impersonal and intellectual objectives. The goal of teaching philosophy, as Goosens sees it, is to teach a certain special kind of creative productivity.[4]

Goosens' position is not uncharacteristic of the stance adopted by those in major university philosophy departments. It appears that the position is also characteristic of those in major university departments of other humanities areas.[5]

These departments exert a major influence on the attitudes of community and four-year college professors and on the curriculum.[6] They influence faculty attitudes because the majority of faculty are trained in the academic Masters and Doctors degree programs offered in those departments. They influence curriculum, for such university departments have the deciding voice in determining the transferability of community and four-year college courses.[7] The views here attributed to the university humanities areas will be called the 'university orientation'.

At the same time the university orientation pushes the goals of humanities education in one direction there is another view which exerts influence on community and four-year college humanities education. This view will be called the 'liberal education orientation'. This position maintains that humanities instruction should be directed toward the broader goal Goosens denegrates.

Recent literature regarding directions in community college humanities education supports the conclusion that the shift from the "junior college" to the "community college" mode has caused humanities education to be evaluated more in terms of its contribution to general education than the previously emphasized contribution to specialized university programs.

Koltai urges that the emphasis on cultural heritage not be lost in the effort to make community college education accountable to the vocational and pragmatic demands being placed on community colleges.[8] Turesky emphasizes the humanities' contribution to students' critical awareness.[9] A 1964 Commission on the Humanities stressed the humanities' contribution toward engendering the development of integrated human beings.[10] Luskin sees the humanities' role as that of getting students to ask the central question of what things have intrinsic value.[11] Marty recommends that the humanities be taught to intensify students' interest in liberating

humane purposes.[12] Peterson holds that the humanities promote inquiry into the meaning and purpose of human existence.[13] Janaro identifies the goal of humanities education to be broadly defined as promoting the self-actualization of students.[14] Silverman reports that the goal of secondary school humanities programs is viewed to be some species of moral improvement: the aims of the program being extrinsic to the subject matter.[15] Grabo argues for a combination of a content approach with a heavy emphasis on general student development.[16] Sievers emphasizes that the humanities should "engage" students in addressing the central moral questions of daily existence.[17]

These themes echo the traditional aims of general or liberal arts education that have been around for decades. McGrath's work of the late 1940's presents characterizations of the goals of humanities education essentially the same as those just listed.[18]

Resulting Conflicts and Problems

There is a major problem confronting someone in an educational leadership role in humanities education in community and four-year colleges. The desirability of transferability pushes the basic conflict to the forefront. Grover pinpoints the problem when he says: "If two-year college philosophy instructors do a good job as university-oriented professionals, they do a bad job as junior college

instructors.[19] The converse also seems to hold. Cohen also recognizes the impinging gravity of the problem situation confronting those involved in humanities education. He sees the problem being one of conflict between the impracticality of humanities' goals with community demands for positive results.[20]

How are the gaps between serving community demands, serving academia, and serving the mission of general education to be bridged? Finding answers to this question is a major problem that confronts humanities department/division chairpersons.

To be sure this problem is not unique to the humanities disciplines. It bears equally on all those having a part in the transfer component of community or four-year college curriculum. Nonetheless this basic problem over goals is a reality of humanities education as it exists today which must be recognized and dealt with.

Recommended "Solution"

On the assumptions that very few community or four-year colleges can throw out their transfer level humanities courses and that there will be a continuing need to serve students with pragmatic interests it follows that a humanities department/division chairperson has a difficult problem to cope with.[21] A direct way to deal with this problem is for the disciplines in the department/division to develop a

"two-pronged" curriculum. That is, courses designed to serve the two different interest groups. This suggestion has the advantages and drawbacks of "developmental course" programs. The less academically oriented courses can be feeders to the transfer courses for those going that direction but are deficient in basic skills. The same courses can stand on their own for humanities credit at the Associates or Bachelors degree level. The main disadvantage is that any division between students bound for further academic work and those not tends to take a condescending, elitist tone. This however can be minimized through planning and cooperation from student services people, faculty, and administrators.

A choice is involved in this recommendation. Should an effort be made to give students the best course for their level and aspirations, or should everyone be fitted into one mold? The former alternative is the author's choice. This choice is the only one consistent with the community and four-year college "philosophy." But in addition to the community and four-year college ideal there is the community and four-year college reality. This takes us to consideration of the matter of resources. Can a community or four-year college afford to implement such two-pronged programs? Many would say "no" and recommend programs that in the end do not do justice to the needs of one or the other student interest group. This is to abandon the community college ideal and may be detrimental to the aims of four-year colleges. It is

to say, in effect, that the institution cannot afford to do what it is charged to do. The present proposal is that the institution find ways to support those programs necessary to the attainment of the institutions' basic aims.[22] A humanities department/division chairperson should take a leadership role in promoting the right course of action in her or his institution.

Challenges and Pitfalls

The implementation of a two-pronged curriculum will not in itself resolve the goal conflict between the university orientation and the liberal education orientation. For the two-pronged curriculum addresses the problem of differing student interests and abilities. That leaves the matter of the direction of the total instructional effort undefined. Thus a humanities department/division chairperson must find additional means to resolve or make manageable the goal conflicts that exist.

A first step towards resolution seems to be to equally recognize the value of both sets of goals and to strive for a happy marriage between the two in the department/division program. Such a marriage could take the form of not sacrificing professional standards while at the same time adjusting their application to the level, interests and needs of the students. Faculty who are teaching professionals as well as academic professionals will be sensitive to the

limitations on the degree to which professional standards can be applied to foster student growth and enrichment.

There are two extremes that must be avoided. One, the attempt to satisfy student interest through those relevance-seeking approaches that are academically unsophisticated. Such approaches may be popular and enjoyable to students but do not serve to advance their intellectual-emotional development. Examples that come to mind are such things as the teaching of eastern religions and occult studies under the auspices of the humanities. There are philosophical, literary and ethical contents to these subjects but in many relevance-oriented programs this content is not treated in an intellectually respectable manner. Rather the students are too often encouraged to "try on" different "modes of life." This is analogous to having comparative religion students conduct Mass while studying Catholicism. This has such minimal cognitive value that it should not be considered a respectable approach to humanities education. Humanities education needs to promote the students' intellectual capacity to understand and evaluate ideas and theories of practice. Also to promote the students' effective sensitivity to differing cultural forms. Relevance-seeking can sell out the humanities stake in these goals with the result that students leave a course with some new knowledge and experience but with no greater level of

sophistication for being able to deal with the philosophical, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of life.

The second extreme to be avoided is the attempt to be so rigorous and true to professional standards that students are overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity and difficulty of what they are required to confront. In this situation students may memorize their way through but get "turned off" by their experience and do not integrate the benefits offered because they were pitched too high.

Finding the magic line between these two extremes is not an easy task. Yet it is a task that each faculty member should struggle with. A humanities department/division chairperson has the responsibility to understand the conflict situation and foster understanding among the faculty. In addition a humanities chairperson should consciously strive for the proper balance between the conflicting goals in the instructional programs under her or his supervision.

NOTES

[1]J. and E. Thomas (eds.) The Academic Department or Division Chairman: A Complex Role, Balamp, 1972.

A. B. Smith, "Department Chairmen: Neither Fish nor Fowl," Junior College Journal, March, 1972, pp. 40-43

J. Lombardi, The Duties and Responsibilities of the Department/Division Chairman in Community Colleges, Topical Paper #39, ERIC, March, 1974.

[2]W. K. Goosens, "What Philosophy Tries to Teach," Teaching Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975, pp. 3-5.

[3]Goosens, Ibid, p. 10.

[4]Goosens, Ibid, p. 5.

[5]The position is not above challenge. Consider: If a discipline commits itself to the development of productive creativity in students, then the professional standards of evaluating the disciplines' product become the primary criteria for evaluating student work. Where is left for the student to go for a concern with her or his general development if not in the primary instructional setting? It does not appear that specialized training in individual disciplines evaluated by professional standards will add up to general education. The classroom should be the place where students bring themselves not just professionally or academically unshaped shells.

[6]A. Cohen, et al, The Humanities in Two-Year Colleges: Reviewing Curriculum and Instruction, and Faculty in Review, ERIC, Spring, 1975.

[7]R. J. Stupak ("The Anti-University of the 70's," DEA News, No. 12, Winter, 1977) has developed an interesting argument to the effect that the "tide may be turning" and that in the not to distant future the influence of the community college may dominate the universities.

[8]L. Koltai, "Editor's Notes," Merging the Humanities, Koltai (ed.), Jossey-Bass, 1975, pp. vii-xi.

[9]S. G. Tureskey, "Is There Still Room for the Humanities?" in Koltai, Ibid.

[10]"Humanities Commission Report," in Koltai, Ibid.

[11]B. J. Luskin, "A Portable Course With Pop Culture," in Koltai, Ibid.

[12]M. A. Marty, "Teaching History as a Liberating Art," in Koltai, Ibid.

[13]R. E. Peterson, "Film Forums: On Being Human," in Koltai, Ibid.

[14]R. P. Janaro, "Micronizing the Humanities: A Communal Approach," in Koltai, Ibid.

[15]J. Silverman, A Critical Analysis of the Philosophical Foundations of Secondary School Humanities Programs, 1973, Dissertation.

[16]C. F. Grabo, Theoretical Models of Integrated Humanities Programs, 1972, Dissertation

[17]B. R. Sievers, "Keynote Address," The Future of the Humanities in the Community College, J. P. Thiroux (ed.) National Endowment for the Humanities Conference Report, April, 1975, ERIC.

[18]E. J. McGrath, et al, The Humanities in General Education, Wm. C. Brown Co., 1949.
E. J. McGrath, (ed.) Toward General Education, Macmillan, 1948.

[19]R. A. Grover, "Philosophy and the University/Two-Year College Conflict," Teaching Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975, p. 30.

[20]A. Cohen, et al, The Humanities in Two-Year Colleges: Reviewing Curriculum and Instruction, ERIC, 1975.

[21]These assumptions are supported by the literature reviewed by Cohen concerning the student composition and enrollment trends relating to the humanities in community colleges.
A. Cohen, et al, The Humanities in Two-Year Colleges: A Review of Students, ERIC, 1975.

[22]E. F. Schumacher (Small Is Beautiful, New York, Perennial Library, 1975) argues that overemphasis upon issues of "affordability" may lead to the neglect of human value issues of paramount importance. This theme draws support from the philosophical analyses of R. S. Peters (see Authority, Responsibility and Education, New York, Paul Erickson, Inc., 1973).